

# Folic Acid for Healthy Babies



## Folic acid, a B vitamin, can prevent many serious birth defects of the brain and spine

- Each year in the United States almost 4,000 babies will not be able to walk or will die from serious birth defects of the spine (spina bifida) or brain (anencephaly). More than half of these birth defects could be prevented if all women get enough folic acid before and in the first weeks they are pregnant.
- Spina bifida can cause serious disabilities. Children with spina bifida might have learning disabilities. These children also might have little or no bowel and bladder control and might not be able to walk.
- Babies with anencephaly die before birth or shortly after.
- All women who can get pregnant should get enough folic acid each day, even if they are not planning a baby. Half of the pregnancies in the United States are not planned. These birth defects of the spine and brain happen before most women know they are pregnant.
- Most multivitamins and one serving of many breakfast cereals have all the folic acid a woman needs in a day. Foods made from "enriched" flour or grain products now have some folic acid; examples are bread, pasta, and rice. Check the labels to be sure you get 100 percent of the Daily Value (DV) of folic acid each day.
- CDC, the National Council on Folic Acid, and the March of Dimes want to make sure all women who can get pregnant get enough folic acid each day to prevent some serious birth defects of the brain and spine.



**Help us prevent birth defects.**

**The time to prevent birth defects is before you get pregnant.**

For more information about folic acid and healthy babies, please visit:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid> or e-mail [Flo@cdc.gov](mailto:Flo@cdc.gov)

Promoting the health of  
babies, children, and adults,  
and enhancing the potential  
for full, productive living.

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